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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
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SUBJECT: Syria/Iraq, Syria/Australia, Syria/US, Syria/UN, Bush's
Iraq Strategy, Al-Hariri Investigation (1/12-15)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers over the weekend reported the visit to Damascus by Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, beginning on Jan. 14, the first such visit in three decades. President Talabani received a warm welcome in Syria. He was received by and met with President Asad. Talks during the meeting dealt with bilateral relations between the two countries on all levels. Both leaders stressed their keenness to improve joint relations in all domains. President Asad expressed Syria's readiness to help Iraqis achieve national reconciliation and establish their country's unity, safety and stability, stressing Syria's full support for the ongoing political process in Iraq. For his part, Iraqi President Talabani hailed Syria's stances towards Iraq, noting that "Syria has never withheld any help for Iraq."

Papers on Jan. 15 reported that Former US President Jimmy Carter called upon the US administration to commence a dialogue with Syria and Iran on Iraq and other issues in the region, underlining that such a dialogue may enable all sides to understand one another better and lead them to a joint vision. In a special interview broadcast on Jan. 14 by al-Jazeera television, Carter said he hoped that an international conference on Iraq would be held soon with the participation of all its neighbors, in addition to several international decision-making capitals and international organizations. He underscored the necessity of preserving Iraq's unity and said he considers the recommendations of the Baker-Hamilton commission a good background for reaching a solution in Iraq.

Papers on Jan. 14 reported that United Nations SecGen Ban Ki-moon stressed that the UN was fully committed to a peaceful, comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict on all tracks, on the basis of UN resolutions 242 and 338. Ki-moon's remarks came during a meeting with Syria's Permanent Envoy to the United Nations, Dr. Bashar al-Ga'afari, who extended to him President Asad's congratulations and best wishes on assuming his new post as UN chief. During the meeting, Mr. Ga'afari confirmed UN responsibility for the Arab-Israeli conflict, calling for a comprehensive settlement on the basis of the Madrid terms of reference, the land-for-peace principle and relevant UN resolutions.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad and Iraqi President Talabani reiterate the importance of consolidating Syrian-Iraqi ties and relations between the brotherly people of the two countries. President Asad: We support the political process in Iraq. President Talabnai: We owe Syria a lot and we will not forget its favors" (Government-owned Tishreen, 1/15)

"Vice President Shara to Dr. Meredith Burgmann, Chairman of the New South Wales Senate: Foreign interventions are behind tension in the region. Burgmann discusses with Shara reopening an Australian Embassy in Damascus" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 1/12)

"Former US President Jimmy Carter calls for opening dialogue with Syria and Iran" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 1/15)

"United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon supports a comprehensive solution for the conflict in the Middle East" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 1/14)

"Contrary to US policy, European political moves demand furthering the peace process in the region" (Government-owned Tishreen, 1/14)

"Spain suggests that Arab countries join the Quartet. Rice supports moderate Arab countries. Hanieh: Rice's visit to foil Palestinian legitimacy" (Government-owned Tishreen, 1/13)

"Russia and Iran call for reviving the peace process: The Netherlands: No peace in the region without Syria" (Government-owned Tishreen, 1/13)

"The Al-Sader movement rejects Bush's new strategy in Iraq. Restrictions regarding US targeting of religious figures is removed" (Government-owned Tishreen, 1/13)

"Democrats describe the new US strategy in Iraq as not representing the will of voters. A Republican Senator: The new US strategy in Iraq is the biggest mistake since the Vietnam War. Member of the Baker Commission depicts the new US strategy in Iraq as very dangerous. US Senator Reed: A decision might be passed opposing the plan. Observers: the new US strategy is a coup d'etat against the Baker-Hamilton report. Russia: A device to be used in internal political competition in the US. French daily 'Le Monde': The US strategy in Iraq is doomed to failure. British daily 'the Guardian': The US strategy is a wrong adventure" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 1/12)

"Former officer at the US National Security Agency: The Israeli Mossad assassinated Lebanese PM al-Hariri" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 1/14)

"Hasan Nasrallah, SecGen of Hizbollah, wonders: What is the secret behind US love for the al-Seniora government? Nasrallah: The International Tribunal is to settle accounts and not to unveil killers" (Government-owned Tishreen, 1/15)

"A draft letter at UN Security Council demanding that Serge Brammertz, new chief of UN Investigating Commission, unveil names of countries that failed to cooperate with his committee" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 1/14)

"Observers: Russia's demand to unveil countries that failed to cooperate with the international investigation into the killing of al-Hariri has embarrassed America and France. The unconstitutional government persists in its violations" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 1/12)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"A Caricature Scenario of a Flaring Crisis"

Isam Dari, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote

(1/13): "It is as though the destiny of nations were a commercial deal! This, simply, is how the US Administration, which is rebelling against international law and all other laws and norms, is dealing with the countries and nations of the world.

"In the House of Representatives yesterday, and just before honoring the region with her visit, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice appeared before the world to defend the new war strategy that President George Bush laid out. She repeatedly used the word 'bargain', as if we were in a cheap 'bazaar' or auction....

"With an envious ability, Rice installed herself -- and this is her job -- as an advocate of the devil and a staunch defender of the heavy stick and the language of steel, fire, and aggression, not only in Iraq -- where the administration of the Zionized neoconservatives wants to send over 20,000 additional troops -- but also in the entire world, especially the Middle East....

"Syria is lucky this time: Rice drew our attention to the fact that President Bush needs the approval of Congress if he decides to invade Syria! Let us leave her with her illusions and wild imagination, on which she heavily relied in giving her answers....

"It is ludicrous that Bush laid out a caricature scenario in case the United States eases its pressure on Iraq: The extremists will control oil sources. Iran will manage to possess weapons of mass destruction. And American national security will face unlimited threats, and every American citizen will be endangered! What is this rare intelligence and strategic farsightedness, that is based on illusions, probabilities, and fortunetelling...?

"We no longer pin any hope on a late American awakening or on a change in the conduct of the Bush administration. This

administration is a totally hopeless case...."

"Bush... Whereto"

Hanan Hamad, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, said (1/13): "Bush's new strategy for Iraq shows that he is going ahead with the invasion plan, injecting new blood into its veins, even if the whole world, including the United States, opposes him. Indeed, the strategy is inclined to expand this invasion.

"What is now happening in Somalia, and the warnings to Syria and Iran, constitute an important indication.... In addition to the intention to blame Iraqis later for the possible failure of the strategy, Bush's plan was accompanied by a new wave of deception for the American people themselves, who taught their president an unforgettable lesson in the recent election. He said that the American forces are engaged in a battle that will determine the course of the global war on terror and the future of American national security. In this, he repeats the same tune that seeks to frighten Americans and offers an unsuccessful justification for his rejection of the Baker-Hamilton recommendations and his failure to heed the clear message that the Americans sent him through the Congressional elections...."

"In the Wrong Direction"

Muhammad Khayr al-Jammali, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (1/12): "President Bush's new strategy for Iraq is doomed to failure because it will produce nothing other than more mistakes and disastrous results....

"Bush's new strategy has nothing new except its characterization as new. With its endeavor for an open stay in Iraq over an unspecified period and for the continuation of the war and the sacrifices, as Bush said in his explanation, and with its declared threats to Syria and Iran, the strategy is an extension of the previous Bush strategies with which he began the war on Iraq, strategies that

resulted in major mistakes that the US president could not but concede and take responsibility for. This means that he continues to move in the wrong direction without considering the grave consequences of this approach for the future of American interests and the reputation of his policy, which has hit rock bottom, and without paying attention to the victims of this approach among the American and Iraqi peoples."

"The Will of Iraqis"

Samir al-Shibani, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (1/13): "President Bush failed to offer a reasonable formula to break free from the Iraqi quagmire.... On the contrary, the US President went too far with the language of force and weapons, a language that has proved impotent over the past four years....

"Iraqis alone, through their national unity and understanding of true collective participation in the management of a united Iraq and their categorical rejection of the occupation, can steer their ship toward the shores of safety. Neither Bush's new strategy nor his unveiled democracy can challenge the will of the Iraqis, which has proved throughout history its ability to defeat the old and new Hulagu."

"Where Is the Secret?"

Ali Nasrallah, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote

(1/14): "Syria has always cooperated with the investigation commission into the assassination of former Lebanese PM Rafiq al-Hariri but rejected attempts to politicize the investigations....

"Serge Brammertz, Chief of the Investigation Commission, confirmed Syria's cooperation with the commission and at the same time complained that 10 countries refuse to cooperate with him and respond to his requests. What was the result? Have the 14 February forces, the [Sa'd al-Hariri-led] Future Current, Washington, and Paris demanded that these 10 countries cooperate with Brammertz? On the contrary: The 14 February forces are silent. And not only did Washington and Paris remain silent on the failure of these countries to cooperate, they also rejected the call to name these countries. This proves that there is a secret they want to keep, a truth they do not want to appear, an involvement by governments and intelligence services they do not want exposed, and political targeting and a certain course they do not want changed...."
Corbin